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SUBJECT: UN REFORM AND THE P-5

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Bolton, Permanent Representative, for reasons 1.4 b,d.

¶1. (C) USUN has engaged in a concerted effort to reinvigorate the P-5 as a tool for advancing U.S. interests here in New York, including through more frequent and regular P-5 consultations to discuss a wide range of topics. These consultations, at the Permanent Representative, Coordinator and expert levels, complement the parallel use of the P-5 to address immediate issues before the Council, including Iran, non-proliferation and the Secretary-General selection process. Many of these meetings are prepared through informal P-3 (U.S./UK/France) coordinating sessions to promote wherever possible allied solidarity in this effort.

¶2. (C) Through active P-5 coordination, we have ensured that the members of the P-5 are permanently present on the Peacebuilding Commission's Organizational Committee. A coordinated P-5 response to the drafters of a pernicious General Assembly resolution on Security Council working methods has at least postponed any action on that measure. Continued P-5 consultations on the SYG selection have gone beyond agreeing on Council procedures, to ensure a coordinated position in response to General Assembly calls for a disruptive role in the process. Our effort to gain real oversight of the Secretariat's peacekeeping operations will only be possible through a reinvigorated use of the capability and expertise of P-5 military advisors.

¶3. (C) There can be no guarantee of P-5 solidarity on specific policy issues. Where China or Russia find it in its national interest to oppose U.S. objectives on Iran or Sudan, we will not bring them to our side or eliminate the prospect of a veto solely through a "P-5 first" approach to the consultations or by invoking an appeal to "P-5 unity."

¶4. (C) On questions of UN structure, processes, and membership, however, there is a measure of P-5 unity that, as noted above, we have exploited over the past months. The sense of collective or shared purpose among P-5 members reflects the fact that the Charter establishes the notion of special privileges and responsibilities for the P-5. Despite all the talk in the General Assembly about the "principle of sovereign equality," the UN Charter recognizes and legitimizes the special role the permanent members play on the international stage.

¶5. (C) USUN believes that safeguarding the principle of special privileges, obligations and responsibilities for the permanent members is an important tool to advance our interests here in New York. Unfortunately, this principle is under attack by the broader membership. Some aspirants to permanent membership in the Council have based their candidacy on the argument that the current P-5 membership is unrepresentative and P-5 members abuse their privileges.

Resistance to serious reform, and the most unhelpful alternative reform proposals, are being justified on the need to reestablish the principle of sovereign equality (see the management reform debate) and on the perception that the Security Council, and in particular its permanent members, need to be reined in.

16. (C) One manifestation of the Charter-endowed "special status" of the P-5 is the "P-5 convention." Though much maligned in recent years, the "convention" remains a principle that P-5 members have continued rigorously to uphold. The convention is neither a treaty nor a written agreement but rather a custom that developed during the early days of the UN. It consists of two working assumptions. One is that the P-5 members agree to support each other's candidacies or candidates in all UN elections. The United States has consistently adhered to this element of the convention, which is of particular importance in votes such as election to the ICJ that require a Security Council majority. The other assumption, that the P-5 members should have any seat on a UN body that they seek in exchange for refraining from seeking chairmanships in the GA and ECOSOC, has not been honored by other UN members. The broader understanding among the general membership that P-5 participation in any UN body is good for the organization as a whole has eroded in recent years. P-5 members now fight, lobby and trade for votes just like any other member. The convention, in practice, only guarantees that a P-5 candidate should get the four votes of the other P-5.

17. (C) However, we continue to support the principle that underlies the convention - that any UN body is made more effective with the participation of the P-5 members - and believe that it serves the best interests of the UN as a whole. This is especially important for the United States

since we have no regional group we can count on, unlike the other four permanent members. For our own interests in seeking election to UN bodies, the Charter-based notion of a special role and responsibilities for the P-5 gives us additional leverage in support of our own candidacy or, as we successfully argued with the Peacebuilding Commission, allows us to negotiate for our permanent presence on important bodies.

BOLTON